

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 002136

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/03/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SP](#) [PSOE](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN'S ZAPATERO: STILL IN CAMPAIGN MODE

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Almost three months after his electoral victory and a month and a half after formally taking office, Spanish President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and his Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) remain in campaign mode, intensely focused on winning a decisive victory for Spanish socialist candidates in the European Parliament elections June 13. Zapatero and his party want to be able to point to such a victory as confirmation that their March 14 election was not a fluke or a sop to the terrorists who attacked a Madrid rail station just three days before the national elections. Every decision the new government has taken since the elections, including Zapatero's decision to withdraw troops from Iraq, his trips to France, Germany and Mexico, Spain's desire to abstain on the UNSC ICC rollover resolution, and his plan to delay any decision on increasing Spanish troops in Afghanistan are part of this June 13 win big strategy. After June 13, we expect Zapatero and his party to ease some of their rhetoric, but we are skeptical that there will be any sea change on issues on which the Spanish public has strong opinions, particularly those that distinguish the new government from that of Aznar, s. Zapatero will follow, not lead the Spanish public. Still, we continue to press the Zapatero government to make good on their professed desire to have good relations with the U.S. by giving us concrete examples of support. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Still insecure after the March 14 elections that took place three days after the Madrid terrorist attacks, the PSOE government wants to vindicate its electoral victory by scoring a decisive win against Popular Party (PP) candidates in the June 13 European Parliament elections (usually a yawner here in Spain, but this year a focus of political life). Senior government officials have admitted to us over the past several weeks that the GOS will not make key decisions, such as whether to increase the Spanish troop presence in Afghanistan, until after the June 13 elections. The GOS's desire to abstain rather than vote in favor of the UNSC resolution rolling over the one-year exemption to the ICC for those not party to the Rome Treaty must also be seen in this light, particularly in the context of the Iraq prisoner abuse scandal. At least one official in Zapatero's office readily admitted that until these elections are over, those who deal in foreign policy within and outside of the Spanish government will have to have considerable patience. When we raised our concern that the U.S. was being used as a foil in the June 13 electoral campaign, the official said that the visit by President Aznar to the U.S. -- still highly controversial here -- could be seen in a similar light.

13. (C) Though PSOE won the March 14 election convincingly, if surprisingly, the party wants to dispel any notion that their victory was a direct result of the terrorist attacks and that the Spanish troop withdrawal from Iraq was a cave-in to Al-Qaeda. The March 11 terrorist attacks have also become part of the campaign here, with PSOE seeking to show that the Aznar government did not read the warning signs on Islamic terrorism and manipulated public opinion into believing that the Basque terrorist group ETA had carried out the attack (in the belief that if the Spanish populace blamed ETA, Aznar's party would have won the elections). The PP counters that the Socialists manipulated crowds and public opinion the day before the elections and that PSOE supporters in the police and elsewhere passed investigation information on to PSOE before it reached PP government officials. All of this played into the debate on whether to convene a commission to investigate the terrorist attacks. Both parties eventually agreed to establish such a commission, in the hope that information developed would discredit the other. But the commission, formally established on May 26, will not hold its first session until after the June 13 elections.

14. (C) PSOE has made foreign policy the key issue in the campaign. Rhetoric remains particularly harsh on Iraq, the U.S. and Aznar. Zapatero has remained generally above the fray, and has declined opportunities to criticize the U.S. on the Iraq abuse allegations, instead allowing the PSOE chief European Parliament candidate to take the lead. Still, Defense Minister Bono has been very prominent in "orchestrating" the return of Spanish troops from Iraq, and he denied May 24 (though every interlocutor in Zapatero's office and the MFA insist to the contrary) that the government is considering augmenting troops in Afghanistan

and possibly sending a presence to Haiti. The government has made clear, however, that especially during the June 13 campaign, it does not want to link the withdrawal of troops from Iraq with an increase in Afghanistan. Zapatero's trips abroad, including to Morocco, France, Germany, and Mexico, fit into PSOE's desire for a large victory on June 13; each visit has allowed Zapatero to showcase how he and his government plan to differ from what they call Aznar's excessive kow-towing to the U.S. at the expense of core Spanish interests.

15. (C) The PSOE and the government remain extremely anxious to avoid provoking public opinion even though polls show they are ahead some 6-10 percent. While the PP had initially hoped to pull off a strong showing June 13, the party seems to have backed off of this idea in order to avoid embarrassment. PP strategists tell us that the party regards defeat as likely and is focusing on keeping the margin of defeat as narrow as possible.

16. (C) Though we expect the government to settle down a bit after the elections and ease the rhetoric, we do not expect a major turnaround by the Zapatero government on issues the Socialists feel are based on principles, Spanish consensus or to which they expect Spanish popular opinion to be opposed, in other words the vast majority of issues. We do not expect a major troop increase in Afghanistan, nor a change of heart on the ICC resolution. Even on the Iraq UNSC resolution, on which the GOS has professed to want to be helpful, we expect Spain to stand firm on their desire for a date certain for withdrawal of coalition forces (or at least a one-year renewal clause) and issues related to command and control of coalition forces.

17. (C) One area, however, which the new Spanish government has not made an issue, is the U.S. presence on Spanish bases at Rota and Moron. Thus far, neither the new government nor the PSOE has said this is a bone of contention with the U.S. In fact, when press reports indicated a possible reduction in local civilian presence at bases in Europe, including in Spain, the press and some government officials expressed concern -- probably because loss of Spanish jobs at Rota, for example, could harm the economy of Andalusia, a major Socialist regional stronghold.

ARGYROS